

Testimony of Mark Brewer Regarding Congressional Redistricting

Before the Michigan Senate Redistricting Committee June 28, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Mark Brewer, Chair of the Michigan Democratic Party. I have been involved in Legislative and Congressional redistricting in Michigan since the early 1980's. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on Congressional redistricting.

Introduction

On behalf of the voters of Michigan, the Michigan Democratic Party is very disappointed in the partisan hijacking of the redistricting process represented by the Congressional redistricting plan proposed by Republicans on June 17, 2011 which passed the House last week as HB 4780. Never in Michigan's history has a redistricting map been gerrymandered to be so overtly partisan and disrespectful of community interests to build partisan political advantage. This map zigs and zags throughout Southeastern Michigan to create non-competitive seats that do not represent the demographics of the state and will disenfranchise voters.

The people of Michigan deserve Congressional districts produced by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor that will ensure fair representation in keeping with Michigan's history of competitive districts that respect communities of interest. The people of Michigan deserve to choose their Representatives in Congress - this map clearly was drawn to let the Republican Representatives choose their voters.

Analysis

At a time when population loss over the last decade reduces our State's influence in Congress by one Congressional seat, it is absolutely essential that redistricting be conducted in a fair manner to fully reflect all of the citizens of our State.

The Congressional plan in HB 4780 fails any test of fairness, compactness, and meaningful representation.

The map shreds counties and communities, eliminates competitive districts, and reduces representation in the 2nd largest county in the State.

Gerrymandered Districts

Never before in Michigan's history have districts zigged and zagged all over a large geographic region for partisan advantage.

The two Detroit districts are no longer centered in Detroit. For example, District 14 starts at the edge of River Rouge, sweeps over the Pointes, loops west to Southfield and Farmington Hills, before heading north and using a small stretch of land at Sylvan Lake to get to Pontiac. The district is over 50 miles long but at some points less than half a mile wide.

District 11, previously a Western Wayne and Western Oakland County district now starts in Canton and stretches all the way over and around Pontiac, cutting through a slice of Rochester Hills to connect to Troy before looping around to capture Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills. By taking in Farmington, it is literally only a few blocks wide at one point.

Non-Competitive Districts

Competitive districts are better for voters and better for democracy. Over the last decade, Michigan has seen competitive Congressional races in at least four districts and in the decade before that five districts were competitive. They reflected the competitive nature of our state overall as surveys show that the state is equally divided between Democrats, and Republicans.

The Republican plan would reduce the number of competitive districts. There is not one district under the Republican plan that is 50-50 in partisan make-up when one reviews previous election results. It is clear they sought solely to strengthen the partisan make-up for their Congressional Republican incumbents.

By reducing competitive districts, this plan disenfranchises not only Democrats and Republicans but independent voters – by making partisan primaries the key elections and making general elections irrelevant.

Violates Community Boundaries

Michigan has a tradition of respecting city and county lines in redistricting. This plan ignores that tradition to seek partisan advantage for Republican incumbents.

For example, in Oakland County, the City of Farmington is an "island" surrounded by Farmington Hills. For the first time, Republicans use a narrow path to cut through to the City of Farmington and separate it from Farmington Hills. Similarly, the City of Bloomfield Hills is separated from Bloomfield Township. Rochester Hills is split up simply to allow the Republicans to make their gerrymander contiguous. In Montcalm County, the City of Greenville is also an "island".

In the short space of 18 miles in southeast Michigan, a voter could go through 8 Congressional districts. Driving south from Orion Township in the 8th District, you then enter the 11th Congressional District in Auburn Hills before passing into the 14th District in Pontiac. You will then enter the 9th District in Bloomfield Township before re-entering the 11th District in Bloomfield Hills before entering the 9th District again before going through the 14th District again in Southfield before finally entering the 13th District in Detroit.

If you drove on Woodward from Pontiac to Detroit you would start in the 14th District, and drive through the 9th District in Bloomfield Township. You would then enter the 11th District while driving through Bloomfield Hills, drive through the 9th again in Bloomfield Township. You then re-enter the 11th in Birmingham before re-entering the 9th District in Royal Oak. When you hit 8 Mile you would enter the 14th District again until you got downtown when you enter the 13th District. You would then arrive at the Detroit River waterfront, 24 miles later, in the same district you left, the 14th District. On this straightforward drive on Woodward you pass through the 14th District 3 times, the 9th District 3 times, the 11th District twice, and the 13th District once.

The Democratic Alternative

These problems in Southeast Michigan are solved by the congressional redistricting map released yesterday by the Michigan Democratic Party which complies with the Voting Rights Act, and is more compact, contiguous, and competitive in Southeast Michigan than the Republican gerrymandered map passed by the House last week.

This map is proof that you can comply with the Voting Rights Act without gerrymandering districts the way Republicans did in their map. This map is more compact and contiguous than the Republican map, keeps like-minded areas together, and creates more competitive districts to ensure voters are not disenfranchised.

Republican map-drawers who testified to the House Redistricting Committee last week said it wasn't possible to draw two majority-minority districts without the geographic contortions of their map, but this map proves that testimony to be false. Their map is drawn to maximize a Republican advantage while the Democratic map is drawn to follow the law, give voters a choice, and ensure the districts are as compact as possible. The Democratic map is far superior to the Republicans' gerrymandered proposal.

Conclusion

Voters in Michigan have never before faced such a shamelessly partisan redrawing of Congressional boundaries. Instead of drawing fair lines that follow community and county borders in a logical way, the Republican plan is so skewed that it exploits every trick in the book to gerrymander districts in ways that benefit Republican incumbents. The Legislature and Governor Snyder should reject this gerrymandered plan and draw Congressional boundaries in a way that puts Michigan voters' interests squarely ahead of flagrant partisan advantage.